Colin Christian

TRYPOPHOBIA

Allison C. Meier

Kris Kuksi - Samuel D. Gliner

Cover: “Teeth”, 2014, 8 by 12 inches, opposite: “Alive”, 2014, 19 by 15 inches

Foreword by Kris Kuksi

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“Parasitic”, 2014, 26 by 10 inches

“Insides”, 2014, 13 by 8 inches

Foreword by Kris Kuksi

Colin Christian.

Daring, edgy, and downright grotesquely sublime.

In his debut show at Stephen Romano gallery, Colin Christian's work sets the audience up for confrontation. With either a reaction of instant repulsion or a desire to tend to gaping, teeth-filled sores, the exhibition seems as though for 'freaks only'. Far from the pin-up gal or anime charged figures, but the influence of science fiction lingers and the perfection of flesh presents itself from yet another perspective.

The viewer meets these works mid-cycle of injury where a sensation of the tightening, scabbing process is taking place as a result from coagulating fluid secretions. One could spar over the statement that these works relate to the process of healing. Yet, another twist holds the question: could this actually still be in the venue of a cyber erotic play that just digs a bit deeper, forgetting the superficiality perfection of skin and dives into what happens when the flesh is pierced and broken?

It appears that Colin enjoys celebrating one's discomfort towards a damaged system, the metaphorical, bruised status quo having to look in upon its dissolve from the inside. The infection comes to the surface like a hemorrhagic fever ridding the filth of deceit and impurities but looking glamours all the while. And then there are those teeth—teeth-filled holes where the wounds bite back with pride and shock.

Perhaps Colin appreciates deformity as a humble experience but for some picking at scabs is a selfless act of self-medication. Humility and healing inspection go hand in hand and are not just skin deep.

“Ruining Perfection: Colin Christian’s Deconstruction of His Futuristic Muses”

by Allison C. Meier

A vivid optimism about the future has defined much of Colin Christian’s art. Fiberglass space girls pour their curves into seductive suits, and chimerical women gaze with glossy, gargantuan eyes from faces of cartoonish perfection. The automotive paints and silicone details are carefully engineered by the London-born artist into forms that are both alluring and alien, the coquettish figures sometimes towering over seven feet tall, with extreme anatomy like pulp sci-fi pinups. Accenting the pop surrealism are space helmets, holographic details, and sleek astral fashion influenced by his early 1990s work in creating latex fetish clothing with his wife Sas. It’s a vision of the future where the carnal and the cosmic can fuse, the troubles of the past left behind.

However, 2014 was a bleak year. Ebola, accounts of CIA-supported torture, the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, the missing girls of Nigeria, the violence of ISIS, extreme police brutality, and a seemingly endless procession of such news cast dark shadows over a hopeful future. “I found it difficult to reconcile poppy mod-inspired forms with the news and and my mindset during the year,” Christian explains. “My career has mostly featured an idealized cartoon version of reality, but I decided to strip that surface away, to deconstruct everything that I had been so careful to construct in the first place.”

Revealed by that dissection is something festering beneath the pristine façade. The work of Christian’s TRYPOPHOBIA exhibition is Lovecraftian in its creation of visuals that are almost hard to look at all at once, but difficult to explain why. Trypophobia is a pathological fear of holes, especially those packed close together in irregular formations that stir a physical revulsion. Like our shuddering disgust in viewing a rotting corpse, even when there is no actual danger, trypophobia seems to be rooted in some biological fear, where holes suggest danger. Maybe something is hiding inside; maybe you will fall in.

The uncomfortable patterns of holes riddle the TRYPOPHOBIA sculptures, along with some dentophobia. Glistening teeth jut out from wounds gaping open on one of Christian’s long-lashed lady’s faces, consuming one of the beautiful eyes. A splattering of pocked holes mars the side of a nose on another fragment of a face, where the pattern uneasily reaches up to an eye laced with holes, with what looks like worms creeping out. The voyeurism of Christian’s older work is still here, but with an instinctive aversion.

This is the science fiction of horror rather than a future harmony, influenced by the unsettling medical videos now popular on YouTube, like botfly extraction, and the pop culture of David Cronenberg movies and television's Hannibal. "It seems to me there is a huge interest in freaks, abnormalities, infection, and the grotesque right now," he says. "Horror movies are always popular in times of economic downturn anyway, and I, too, found myself relaxing watching the repulsive."

Christian has long been something of an anatomist since starting his fiberglass work in the late 1990s, like his "capsules" that reveal silicone suggestive body parts encased in white cyber eggs. Yet with TRYPOPHOBIA the sculptures are much more akin to pre-photography medical illustrations or wax moulages that immaculately replicated all the detail of illness. His fabricated flesh with its mess of holes has the nauseating realness of places like the Musée des Moulages at the Hôpital St Louis in Paris, where over 4,000 casts and models of skin diseases are arranged by affliction. The horrible ravages of leprosy and syphilis in wax would melt if held to a flame, but looking at them we still have the same recoil as if they were real.

Nevertheless, TRYPOPHOBIA isn't all repulsion. Even with the teeth gnawing out of resin cheeks, eyes, and someone's disembodied backside, there's a weird attraction with them. Like the 18th-century anatomical models of women, known as the wax Venuses," with their innards all exposed while their heads topped with flowing hair are tossed back serenely or in seeming ecstasy, there's an uncanny beauty. The Venus waxes, like those sculpted by Clemente Susini in the 1790s still on display at La Specola in Florence, had their intestines spilling out of their stomachs and their hearts exposed, but they remained voluptuous. Likewise, the TRYPOPHOBIA sculptures retain some beauty even when corrupted, their parted lips still glossy, their good doll eye that hasn't been eaten by infection still beckoning.

As Christian has moved away from hyper perfection to exposing the decay below the surface in his incredibly built art, he's also tapped into this provocative history of the beautiful and the grotesque. There's been a recent resurgence in this morbid attraction, from academic institutions like the Wellcome Library making their vast archives of medical imagery available online, to sensational spectacles Body Worlds with its real flayed humans. As this imagery popularizes, we're confronted with the question of why, and if it's twisted to be so drawn to such human horror.

Perhaps with all the very real darkness in the world, we need these visceral visuals for a release.

“Eye-Teeth”, 2014, 7 1/2 by 7 1/2 inches

“Underneath”, 2014, 7 1/2 by 3 1/2 inches

TRYPOPHOBIA interview by Samuel D. Gliner .

SG How did the exhibit's title "TRYPOPHOBIA" originate, and was there a particular meaning you wanted to convey to your audience?

CC After seeing the response to 'Teeth", I researched the subject intensively, I went through thousands of comments to try and find what had triggered such a visceral response, and the more I checked, I realized that I too suffered somewhat from the condition. So, I decided to confront it directly, to tap into my own discomfort and see what happened.

SG What inspired you to create the genesis of the body of work, "Teeth", and what are your thoughts on why it went so viral?

CC For most of my art career I have specialized in optimistic futurism, an idealized cartoon future where we finally got our shit together, our worries were over apart from how sexy our spacesuits should be, but the past several years of news events seemed to make those ideas not only too idealistic but actually pointless, it felt fake to carry on in that way, simply put, I was not happy. So instead I tapped into how I really felt, with a punk attitude of "I don't give a shit" as far as how the work would be received, and to my genuine surprise the response was very positive. The word 'corruption' kept ringing in my ears and the work reflects that. It's that idea of something rotten underneath the facade, something to be picked at, squeezed out, removed.....I felt a weird sense of relief in creating "Teeth", I think though that it triggered a physical response in the viewer, I kept reading things like "it's horrible, but I can't look away", an impulse to physically interact with the piece, to alter it, very strange.

SG Has the theme for your current exhibit altered your creative process in any way, and how has that affected you?

CC Yes, very much so. Normally a show would take anything from six months to a year to prepare, but as the subject matter was a polar opposite from my usual fare, I decided to attack the work in a different way as well, so the construction lacks my

usual finesse, I wanted something more urgent, looser in technique than I normally do, it has taken some getting used to, I am constantly resisting the urge to keep refining each piece until it's perfect, here, I'm looking for the opposite of perfection.

SG You have stated in the past that the film Barbarella has been a major influence on your sci-fi inspired work. Given the pathological horror theme of your current exhibit, who or what were your inspirations?

CC I watched a lot of Cronenberg movies, and way too many Botfly and Jigger removal videos on YouTube, I tried to capture that gut instinct to want to look away.

SG The majority of your works have a strong sense of sexuality, do you think that your current show deviates from that or does it have an underlying sexual tone as well?

CC Only as a side note. The sexuality in most of my work is also accompanied with a sense of fun, a giggle, and I didn't feel that was appropriate for this show. But I did use the triggers of what is attractive, and tried to twist them into something more uncomfortable.

SG Being so immersed in your subject, did you have any moments of uncertainty towards what you were creating, since such a potent psychological phenomenon may have consequences?

CC I found it difficult to break my old habits, techniques, the way I see things, that way has bought me some level of success, and with this work there is a level of challenge in finding an audience, I mean, who wants to look at something that makes them feel possibly nauseated or repulsed? For some it goes way beyond that gut reaction into something very physical, itchy skin, hives, possibly anger? But I would feel a cheat for not doing it. I was determined to show how I felt. I wanted to deconstruct what I had done before, to strip back the layers to hopefully see another truth? I don't know how people will react, and perhaps for the first time, I will not care, and for that reason alone I wanted to do this work.

“Ear”, 2014, 5 by 5 inches

“Grin”, 2014, 17 by 12 inches

“Corrupted”, 2014, 9 by 6 1/2 inches

"Macro", 2014, 15 1/2 by 12 inches

“Mass”, 2014, 9 by 8 inches

“Trypophobia”, 2014, 13 by 13 inches

Acknowledgements

Artist's Dedication:

To my great love and partner of 25 years, Sas Christian.

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Contributors

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Allison C. Meier is a writer on overlooked history and visual culture. Based in Brooklyn, she works as a staff writer at Hyperallergic, a senior editor at Atlas Obscura, and has contributed to the New York Times, GOOD magazine, Narratively, Artinfo, Artnews, and other publications.

Samuel D. Gliner Ukraine born and Brooklyn raised; Samuel is a writer, artist, and designer with a penchant for photography, obscurity, and antiquity. Whether through personal works or as the founder of the art and culture collective, Between Mirrors, he is devoted to the progression of freethinking and the creative process.

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